

# DISABILITY, MENTAL WELLNESS, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Winter Newsletter | January, 2025

## Letter from the Chair:



Dr. Douglas J. Engelman  
Chair (2024-2025)  
University of North Carolina Wilmington  
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I want to take this opportunity to share important updates regarding our newly formed "Disability, Mental Wellness, and Social Justice" division within SSSP. This division represents the merger of the former "Society and Mental Health" and "Disability" divisions, with the aim of enhancing our focus and impact on these critical areas.

In the coming days, a detailed announcement will be released to explain the reasons behind the SSSP division consolidations. This strategic move is designed to streamline our efforts and resources, allowing us to address the interconnected challenges of disability, mental wellness, and social justice more effectively.

Unfortunately, I must also share some personal news that impacts our leadership. I have recently been diagnosed with a serious medical condition that requires immediate and ongoing treatment. Consequently, I have made the difficult decision to temporarily step aside from my role as Chair to prioritize my health and recovery.

During my absence, I am fully confident in our co-chairs, Melinda "Mindy" Maconi and Olaitan Faysal, to lead our division with dedication and expertise. Both have demonstrated exceptional commitment and capability, and I trust them to guide us through this transitional phase. Their leadership will be crucial as we establish our division's mission, goals, and strategic plans for the coming year, ensuring we remain on course despite these initial challenges.

I am reaching out to ask for your support and collaboration as Mindy and Olaitan take on these responsibilities. Your active participation and encouragement are vital to our success. Together, we can build a robust foundation for our division, effectively advocating for disability, mental wellness, and social justice.

Please feel free to reach out to Mindy and Olaitan with your ideas, questions, or offers of support. Your involvement is invaluable, and together we can make a significant impact in our field. Thank you for your understanding, support, and continued dedication to our shared goals. Your commitment during this time is greatly appreciated.



Dr. Douglas J. Engelman  
Chair (2024-2025)  
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Dr. Douglas Engelman is a Lecturer in Sociology and the Graduate Program Director at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. He earned his PhD in Sociology at the University of South Florida and has built a career exploring the intersections of sociology, mental health, and social justice. Doug's commitment to these issues is reflected in his leadership roles, including serving on the boards of NAMI Wilmington and NAMI North Carolina, and cohosting the podcast *Who Isn't F\*cking Crazy*, which delves into the complexities of mental health and wellness from multiple perspectives.

For the past year and a half, Doug has served as Chair of our Mental Health Division. During his tenure, he has worked to foster member engagement, open dialogue, and collaboration, while helping guide the division's merger with the Disability Division to form the newly named Disability, Mental Wellness, and Social Justice Division. Doug is deeply passionate about advancing this division's mission to address systemic inequities and promote innovative approaches to social change, particularly in the realms of mental health and disability.

Doug is also an author, having written *A Boy Broken*, a powerful memoir reflecting on his relationship with his late son, as well as his upcoming book *Indefatigable: In Pursuit of a Life Unbroken by Adversity*. These works draw from his personal experiences and his understanding of Stoic philosophy, focusing on resilience and contributions to humanity.

As Chair, Doug's goal has been to see the newly formed division prosper as a space for insurgent sociology that challenges injustices and fosters meaningful change. He invites all members to collaborate in this exciting new chapter.

### Newsletter Agenda:

- **Division Merger**
- **Introducing to the new Division Co-Chairs**
- **Introduction to the new Session Coordinator**
- **Congratulations to the winners of 2024's Graduate Paper Divisions**
- **Upcoming Sessions for 2025 Annual Conference in Chicago**

## Merging of Disability and Society and Mental Health Divisions

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### **Greetings & Happy New Year to All Division Members!**

As we bring in the New Year, we are pleased to announce some exciting changes for this upcoming year! First and foremost, The Disability & Society Division and the Society & Mental Health Division have merged into the Disability, Mental Wellness, and Social Justice. Our overlapping interests and goals, in terms of respecting, and securing social justice for all bodies and minds has facilitated a smooth transition towards the combining of the divisions.

As we enter 2025 with our new division, we hope to get lots of feedback from our members about goals and priorities for the division. We anticipate creating spaces at the conference for our new co-chairs to meet with members to discuss each person's vision for what they would like to see, at the conference and for the future. This will be our first year as a new division and we hope that we will receive lots of interests and submissions for the upcoming conference. We hope to see you all this August in Chicago!



## Introduction to the Co-Chairs

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Dr. Melinda (Mindy) Leigh Maconi  
Co-Chair (2024-2026)  
Moffitt Cancer Center  
[melinda.maconi@moffitt.org](mailto:melinda.maconi@moffitt.org)

Dr. Melinda (Mindy) Leigh Maconi is a medical sociologist and a Qualitative Research Specialist at Moffitt Cancer Center, with a heavy background as a Disability Studies scholar. She earned her doctoral degree from the University of South Florida in 2022, with an emphasis in Disability Studies.

She has also been a member of SSSP since 2015. Formerly a member of both the Disability division and the Society & Mental Health Division, Mindy's work and her personal experiences/diagnosis brought her very close to both topics. It is her goal to advance both scholarship and activism in the realms of disability, mental illness, and mental health.

Dr. Muhammed Faisol Olaitan teaches sociology, crime, victimology, deviance and social problems in the Department of Sociology, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria. Dr. Faisol's research interests are social problem, deviant behaviour with criminology and penology, sociological issues in crime, victimology, and disability studies. Dr. Faisol is a fellow of Bergen Summer Research School, Norway, and Institute of Advanced Studies, Princeton University, USA and a Mentee of CODESRIA College of Mentors Institute, Dakar.



Dr. Muhammed Faisol Olaitan  
Co-Chair (2024-2026)  
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology  
[olaitanfaysal@gmail.com](mailto:olaitanfaysal@gmail.com)



## Introduction to the Session Coordinator

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We would also like to introduce Lily Ivanova as our new session coordinator!

I have been an enthusiastic participant of the SSSP since I began my graduate studies, and am especially excited about strengthening a sociological community that focuses on mental health in the context of budding public conversations about trauma, healing, and personal and collective responsibilities. In my research, I use ethnographic qualitative case studies to understand how individuals and societies learn and teach about violence and trauma. Currently, I am finishing a study that looks at how identities of healing and responsibility are created and experienced by Indigenous survivors of the Residential School system in Canada and non-Indigenous Canadian migrants and intergenerational settlers. Alongside my research, I am a facilitator and advocate with NEA-BPD, an organization that helps families supporting loved ones with borderline personality disorder.



## Winners of the 2024 Graduate Paper Divisions

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Special Congratulations to Jacob R. Bahnick from the University of North Carolina Wilmington for winning last year's Graduate Student Paper Award, for his paper entitled, "Inside the Classroom: How Does Internet Usage, Early School Day Routines, and Classroom Design Impact the Mental Health of Students?"! We also want to extend recognition and congratulations to Marissa Button, also from the University of North Carolina Wilmington, for her paper, "Childhood Trauma and the Impact on Mental Health Later in Life," which received Honorable Mention. We were very pleased to have such high-quality submissions!

## Upcoming Sessions for 2025 Annual Conference

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This year, our division is hosting five solo sponsored sessions and five co-sponsored sessions!

Please read them carefully to assess if you would be interested in submitting to any of the following sessions!

### Division-sponsored Sessions:

#### **“Pushed to the Brink: Insurgencies, Emergency Responses, Societal Neglect and Vulnerability of People with Disabilities”**

Description:

In the world of insurgencies where opportunities and safety have become a nightmare, people with disabilities are often encountered and confounded with multiple jeopardies. They are bedeviled with the tragedy of contemporary realities and particularly susceptible to vulnerabilities as they are exposed to different kinds of realities during insurgencies. They are faced with difficulties in accessing necessary social protections despite efforts to live dignified lives. They remain invisible and not given priority in the state emergency responses. They, therefore, find themselves grappling with unimagined hardships, voice muted, and have been pushed and left at the fringes of the society. *Thematic Paper Session*

Sponsor: Disability, Mental Wellness, and Social Justice

Organizer: Olaitan, Muhammed Faisol ([olaitanfaysal@gmail.com](mailto:olaitanfaysal@gmail.com))

#### **“Victimisation Experiences and Mitigation of People with Disabilities in Insurgent Committees”**

Description:

People with Disabilities (PWDs), suffer multiple victimisation. This is worsened by socio-cultural beliefs, diseases, poverty, violent attacks and insurgencies. Although extant literature shows the enormity of problems that PWDs face, yet, gaps persist on how they construct and cope with victimisation experiences during insurgencies. This session, therefore, will be examining their victimisation experiences, construction of disability, interventions/mitigations of state and non-state actors who form committees of emergency responses and their coping strategies of PWDs during insurgencies. *Thematic Paper Session*

Sponsor: Disability, Mental Wellness, and Social Justice

Organizer: Olaitan, Muhammed Faisol ([olaitanfaysal@gmail.com](mailto:olaitanfaysal@gmail.com))

### **Collective Healing: Insurgent Strategies for Mental Wellness & Social Justice Movements"**

Description:

Exploring how collective approaches to mental wellness can empower communities and create transformative change in societal structures. Thematic Paper Session

Organizers: Lily Ivanova ([lily.ivanova@ubc.ca](mailto:lily.ivanova@ubc.ca)), Rebecca Qin ([rebeccaq1997@hotmail.com](mailto:rebeccaq1997@hotmail.com)) & Melinda Maconi ([melinda.maconi@moffitt.org](mailto:melinda.maconi@moffitt.org))

### **Mental Illness and Shared Identity Making**

Description:

Approaching mental illness as an identity category beyond a personal diagnosis, this session explores how shared meanings and shared identity-making occurs between members of this category, and how shared meanings conform to and resist medical and society interpretations of what it means to have a mental illness. *Traditional Paper Session*

Organizers: Doug Engelman([engelmand@uncw.edu](mailto:engelmand@uncw.edu)), Melinda Maconi ([melinda.maconi@moffitt.org](mailto:melinda.maconi@moffitt.org)) & Lily Ivanova ([lily.ivanova@ubc.ca](mailto:lily.ivanova@ubc.ca))

### **CRITICAL DIALOGUE: "Diverse Families at the Margins/LGBTQ+/Parents and Children with Disabilities"**

Description: This session focuses on diversity within the family. We welcome submissions for works that touch on topics such as racial/ethnic identity family experiences, LGBTQ+ family experiences, diverse types of parents and or parenting experiences, children and or adults with disabilities. Works on other diverse families are also welcome!



## Co-sponsored Sessions:

### **“The Impact of Trauma on Mental Health Mental Illness and Disability”**

Description: We will discuss various types of traumas and their psychological impacts, as well as the intersectional factors—such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status—that influence these experiences. Participants will engage with research findings, case studies, and trauma-informed care strategies, highlighting the role of social welfare policies in supporting affected individuals.

With Sociology and Social Welfare: Erica Jablonski ([e.jablonski@unh.edu](mailto:e.jablonski@unh.edu))

Co-organizer Rebecca Qin ([rebeccaq1997@hotmail.com](mailto:rebeccaq1997@hotmail.com))

### **“Collaborative Approaches: Schools, Families, and Community mental Health”**

Description: This session will explore innovative strategies that integrate educational and community resources to support mental health. This session will highlight successful partnerships, share best practices, and foster discussions on enhancing collaboration among schools, families, and mental health professionals for holistic support.

With Educational Problems: Kyla Walters ([kyla.walters@sonoma.edu](mailto:kyla.walters@sonoma.edu))

Co-organizer Doug Engelman ([engelmand@uncw.edu](mailto:engelmand@uncw.edu))

### **Intersectionality in Action: Bridging Mental Health and Social Problems Theory to Address Complex Social Issues**

Description: Analyzing the importance of intersectional approaches, this session will illustrate how understanding mental health as a multifaceted social problem can lead to more effective interventions and advocacy strategies. *Traditional paper session*

With Social Problems Theory: Joshua Stout ([jhstout@ilstu.edu](mailto:jhstout@ilstu.edu))

Co-organizer Lily Ivanova ([lily.ivanova@ubc.ca](mailto:lily.ivanova@ubc.ca))

### **“Eco-Anxiety and Technological Solutions: Understanding and Addressing New Mental Health Challenges”**

Description: This session could provide a platform for mental health professionals to discuss this emerging issue and share innovative technological solutions like apps designed to help individuals cope with their anxiety.

With Environment and Technology: Angus Nurse ([angus.nurse@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:angus.nurse@ntu.ac.uk))

Co-organizer Doug Engelman ([engelmand@uncw.edu](mailto:engelmand@uncw.edu))

### **Disrupting the Norm: Mental Health, Illness, and the Law**

Description: This session explores the various ways in which the legal system interacts with those with mental illness and/or mental health conditions, as well as delving into the long-term implications for what those interactions mean and the consequences of these interactions.

With Law and Society: Michael Branch ([branchm@hartwick.edu](mailto:branchm@hartwick.edu))

Co-organizer Faryal Razzaq ([faryalrazzaq11@gmail.com](mailto:faryalrazzaq11@gmail.com))